

Stimulus Package Provides Increased Aid for SNAP Participants

Simply put, no one should go hungry in America. To ensure this, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides an additional \$300 million for States to administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

The new law automatically increases benefits to current recipients on their electronic benefits cards. For example, a four person household will be provided an additional \$80 to spend on groceries. The law recognizes additional needs by allowing States to extend SNAP benefits to more jobless adults without regard to a 3-month time limit.

Serving over 1 in 10 Americans in November 2008, SNAP's role among those most in need has never been more relevant. The new funding puts more healthy food within reach for the over 31 million Americans each month that rely on these crucial benefits. And as more and more hard-working individuals and families face difficult choices between purchasing groceries or paying bills, SNAP is an important resource in reducing food insecurity.

SNAP also provides a significant boost to local economies. For every \$5 in new SNAP benefits, \$9.20 is generated in total economic activity. By injecting immediate revenue streams into local business, SNAP helps accomplish a primary goal of the new Act – stimulating the American economy.

SNAP, the new name of the Food Stamp Program as of October 1, 2008, remains the cornerstone of the Nation's nutrition assistance safety net. Along with their allotment benefits, clients in many locations are offered nutrition education to empower them and their families with the skills to choose healthy foods and stay active. Since over half of all SNAP beneficiaries are children, it's imperative that educated choices are learned early to ensure a lifetime of healthy behaviors.

To help achieve healthier lifestyles, SNAP-Ed is an important nutrition education resource to persons eligible for and participating in SNAP. The effort improves the likelihood of healthy food choices within a limited budget and encourages active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid.

To reach the one-third of eligible SNAP recipients not participating, once again, education is essential. Some potential clients are reticent or simply unaware they qualify, still others feel an associated stigma or that their participation might equate to denying others.

This is where FNS' partners and anti-hunger advocates come into play. By reaching the highest-need communities, reducing participation barriers, implementing proven outreach strategies, and communicating the additional resources clients can access, headway can be made. Low-income Americans need to understand that healthy eating is one of the best sources of preventive healthcare, and that SNAP benefits not just themselves but the entire community.

Our Nation's role in ensuring those in need receive assistance has not seen this level of immediacy in decades. Unexpected day-to-day circumstances have put more and more Americans in vulnerable, often unforeseen positions. The good news is help is available with the presence of Federal programs like SNAP – where everyone has the opportunity to eat right, even when money is tight.